

Buffalo City Hall
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-6033

HABS
NY
15-BMF
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ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM TO:

Buffalo City Hall (City Hall)
65 Niagara Square
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-6033

LIBRARY
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P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, DC. 20240

"AMERICA'S CITY HALLS"

BUFFALO CITY HALL

HABS
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Name: Buffalo City Hall; locally, "City Hall".

Location: 65 Niagara Square, Buffalo, Erie County, New York
14202

The building faces east onto the circular drive of Niagara Square at the intersection of Delaware Avenue and Court Street and the confluence of the radial Niagara and Genesee Streets. The building is bounded on its west side by Elmwood Avenue.

Niagara Square is the most important of the several squares of the Joseph Ellicott Plan of 1804. The "Ellicott Plan" follows the L'Enfant-Ellicott Plan of 1792 for Washington, D. C. Andrew Ellicott drafted L'Enfant's plan after L'Enfant was dismissed; Joseph assisted his brother in this work.

1804
LE ENFANT

Foreseeing the creation of a great metropolis, this was the first major city planned in a wilderness - a great basswood and pine forest, for the regional center of the 3,000,000 acre domain of the Holland Land Company. Founded as the Village of Amsterdam (to 1808), the streets carried Dutch names until 1826.

The general concept for the development of the Niagara Square monument was conceived by Daniel Burnham, and it was designed by Carrere and Hastings. The McKinley Monument, an obelisk of 93 feet and fountain and sculpture was completed in 1907. President McKinley was assassinated while attending the Pan American Exposition of 1901.

Niagara Square is considered the center and cultural heart of Buffalo as well as its official location at latitude 42 degrees, 53 minutes north, and longitude 78 degrees, 53 minutes west.

The tower overlooks the renowned waterways of Lake Erie and the Niagara River and the friendly shores of Canada and the Province of Ontario. It commands a view of the 15th largest county of the United States, the Boston Hills to the South, and the spray of Niagara Falls 12 miles to the North.

Owner: Buffalo City Hall has always been owned and occupied by offices and public service functions of the City. From time to time some space has been used by community groups related to City programs, e. g.,

Foreign Trade Missions,
 American City Corp., Consultant for Waterfront Development,
 The Architectural Museum and Resource Center,
 Amvets,
 American Legion,
 Media,
 Lobby newstand operated under the State Commission for the
 visually handicapped,
 Sister Cities Office,
 Buffalo Sesquicentennial (1982) Corporation, and
 Basement Cafeteria is operated by Service Systems, Inc.

Historical Significance: Niagara Square is the centerpiece of Ellicott's plan; a plan Frederick Law Olmsted praised and incorporated into his plan for Buffalo's park system. City Hall also is on the site of Samuel Wilkeson's home. Wilkeson, an early mayor of Buffalo, was the man chiefly responsible for the dredging of Buffalo's harbor so the Erie Canal would terminate at Buffalo rather than at the Village of Black Rock (now part of Buffalo) a few miles to the north. Of course, Buffalo owes much of its spectacular century growth to the Erie Canal.

The City Hall Building serves as a reminder of Buffalo's past. Its decorative art illustrates significant elements in the areas history. Thus, among other things, the following are shown: themes of the Iroquois Indian nation, the development of the Erie Canal, the United States' relation to Canada, and the pioneering and industrial spirit of Buffalo's citizens, past and present. Included too are statues of Buffalonians who were Presidents of the United States; Millard Fillmore and Grover Cleveland. Previously, Cleveland was Sheriff, Mayor of Buffalo, and Governor of the State of New York.

City Hall represents a response to the City's rapid growth between 1876, the date the previous City Hall was completed, and 1930. Buffalo's population more than quadrupled between those years.

Architectural Significance: A very special architectural quality of Buffalo's City Hall is in the rapport developed in the mind of observers by the dignity and form of the edifice. The great open space of Niagara Square and the vistas created by the radial avenues contribute to a strong feeling of "place". This setting is largely defined by bordering structures of monumental character, its spatial qualities are enriched with plant material and sculpture, and the scene is unified by the strong visual geometry of the memorial obelisk. Further unity comes from harmony of the subtle colorations of stone and decorative art and a foil

of strong red brick masonry at peripheral structures and pavements. The municipal skyscraper, with the series of setbacks and sedate tower transmits the symbolism of power with grace and subtlety of form, yet it is in scale with the large foreground space.

The captivation of the viewer is furthered by the sense of calm and repose of the free-standing structure as it thrusts skyward. Equally, at night the wash of lighting on the facade, with contrasting intensity on the receding planes and the softness of the tower's octagonal form, evokes a sense of serenity with strength.

Sculptural and geometric reliefs in stone and terra cotta relieve the broad facade and offer warm colors and patterns while suggesting the proud heritage of the City planned in the wilderness on the rim of the great waterways at its feet.

Ceremonial arrival and entry is reinforced in passing through the colonnade and envelopment in the lobby and corridors by rich materials of walls and vaulted ceilings covered with colorful murals and mosaics. Inspirational inscriptions and fine craftsmanship carries through the building's public and primary spaces in stone, bronze and art glass. Thus architectural significance includes the integration of form, material, art, and a sense of the community's patrimony.

Architect Henry Hornbostel of New York City and Pittsburgh advised the Buffalo City Council at the 1927 presentation of the concept that he was "highly impressed with the work of Mr. Wade and delighted with the conception of the building".

PART - 1 - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. Date of Erection:

The Buffalo City Council authorized the preparation of plans and specifications on July 3, 1928, and approved a general plan on November 12, 1928.

The groundbreaking was on September 16, 1929.

The cornerstone was laid on May 14, 1930. The principal speaker was Buffalonian John Lord O'Brian, Assistant to the United States Attorney General.

The building was fully occupied in November, 1931.

The first Common Council meeting was held in December, 1931.

Dedication ceremonies were held on July 1, 1932, the 100th Anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Buffalo.

2. Architects:

Buffalo City Hall was designed by the Buffalo firm of Dietel and Wade and by Sullivan W. Jones, New York City. The design is attributed to Mr. Wade and to Edward Anthony Pauly, Associate of the firm. Mr. Wade prepared the initial concept. The firm was formed for the project, and Mr. Jones was brought into the work at the suggestion of the City Council.

Buffalo Architect George J. Dietel was born in 1876 and died in 1974.

Buffalo Architect John J. Wade was born in 1893. He studied at the Beaux-Arts Institute, New York City. His experience included work under Henry Hornbostel. He is said to have left Buffalo "probably in the early 1940's".

Buffalo Architect Edward A. Pauly was born June 10, 1902 and died December 1, 1976. He studied at the Harvard University School of Architecture.

Sullivan W. Jones, formerly New York State Architect, was born in New York City in 1878 and died in New York City in 1955. He designed the Al Smith State Office Building in Albany. His work included New York State educational buildings, the Oakland, California City Hall, and county buildings in Pittsburgh and Wilmington.

A survey of office needs was prepared by Buffalo Architect Albert Hart Hopkins, born in Utica, New York in 1885 and died in 1944. He studied at Columbia University. He was associated with Buffalo Architect George Cary and in 1925 became a principal of Edward B. Green & Son and A. H. Hopkins. He "designed the Buffalo Athletic Club, the Genesee Building, and many residences". He was also secretary of the Buffalo City Planning Association.

3. Artists:

Presidents Fillmore and Cleveland statues, Bryant Baker. Friezes on the east and west facades and the lobby figures representing civic virtues, Albert T. Stewart born in England.

Various sculptured reliefs and decorative elements, Rene P. Chambellan and by Graf and McIlveen.

Lobby murals, William de Leftwich Dodge and local craftsmen.

4. Other Professionals:

The City "Specifications" for foundation work (1927) carry the names of Dietel and Wade, Consulting Architects; Howard L. Beck, City Architect; and George J. Goetz, Structural Engineer.

Warwick R. Jewel was the structural engineer for Dietel and Wade.

Meyer, Strong and Jones were the mechanical engineers.

"Floodlighting" of 1931 was designed by Bassett Jones, "illuminating engineer", New York City.

5. Contractors:

The general contractor was the John W. Cowper Co., Buffalo, established 1915. This is the principal construction company of the city. It has constructed many projects throughout the United States. The foundations were placed by Spencer, White and Prentiss under separate contract.

Principal subcontractors included:

Dark & Co. reported on Test Borings at the site in 1926.

Elevators: Otis Elevator Co.

Tile Vaulting: Rafael Guastavino Co.

From project sign on the site:

Heating and Ventilating: E. J. Leary

Plumbing: W. E. Shaddock

Electrical: Robertson Electric Co.

Trucks photographed on the site:

Crawford and Simme Excavating Co.

Rock Asphalt and Construction Co.

Photos indicate "Graf and McIlveen, Sculptors, Bloomington, Indiana".

Exterior materials include Berea Ohio sandstone, Mankoto, Minnesota limestone, a granite base, polychrome terra cotta ornament, and bronze window and spandrel assemblies in the lower three stories.

6. Original Plans:

The City Hall has not been altered in its general appearance.

7. Alterations, Maintenance and Repair:

Facade cleaning:, 1972

Lighting, phased, 1969-1974

Window replacement, 1969

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

In addition to various state and federal officials, special visitors have included Mayors of Japanese and West Germany "Sister Cities" and presidents of the United States, not fully researched yet.

The site history includes many events including skirmishes and battles during the War of 1812, including the Burning of Buffalo in December of 1813, during which all but one or two structures were destroyed. Spectacles included the 1825 hanging of the three Thayer brothers in the presence of "a crowd of 30,000 citizens" after the brothers conviction for murder.

Recent visitations include the great grandson of Benjamin Rathbun, a spectacular building and entrepreneur responsible for the great physical development of Buffalo around 1830. He had some 2500 employees, the first horsecar bus service, and other enterprises contributing to Buffalo's growth rate, the second greatest in the nation at this time.

While a Kendall Company gas station was demolished for City Hall construction, Mayor Wilkenson's mansion and many fine homes made Niagara Square a great residential locale, including President Fillmore's House. Architectural Historian, Reyner Banham, described the character of the present focus of Niagara Square as the City's "civic heart" and the City Hall as an "astonishing Art Deco bulk".

In 1978 City Hall was designated a "Buffalo Landmark" by the Landmark and Preservation Board and the Buffalo Common Council.

PART II - ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. EXTERIOR: (aside from that deducible from photographs)

Detail of the building includes extensive carving, lettering, and polychrome terra cotta of Indian character and historical bas reliefs.

See the attached floor plans for the great variations of the various floors resulting from the setback, pyramidal form.

The overall dimensions of the building are: North-south, 315 feet; east-west, 164 feet. The ground area is 71,770 feet, about 1.2 acres. The principal wings are 14 stories; the tower is 28 stories plus mechanical systems spaces for a total height of 375 feet.

The gross area is 566,313 square feet, usable area being 316,937 square feet.

The land cost \$698,930. and the construction \$6,851,547, with architectural fees adding \$395,783/

The structure is founded on 180 caissons to bedrock, to a depth ranging from 36 to 48 feet.

The structure is a riveted steel frame with reinforced concrete floor systems.

B. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR:

The general corridor layout of the lower stories has been modified to an "E" shaped corridor with elevators at the center. Upper floors have a central elevator bank and long corridor with offices on the periphery.

Interior finishes of public spaces are marble flooring and wainscot with ornamental bronze elevator doors.

Notable finishes include the first floor public spaces of marble, ornamental pilasters, carvings and vaulted ceilings with tile mosaics and inspirational paintings on vaulting.

The 383 seat Council Chamber is highly finished in marble, tile, and carving with millwork of American walnut and a broad and colorful art glass skylight of an Indian sunburst motif.

C. SITE:

The primary entrance faces east onto the broad public square. The building occupies two triangular blocks with streets on all sides, serving state and federal structures of a monumental nature including a recent City Court building, hotels and office structures. The building commands a broad vista of the central business district, the waterfront and the waterways so integral to the development of the pre-eminent position of Buffalo's regional center.

Enhancement of the site is gained by the greensward of the Square, modest flower beds and terraces of the principal facade, and sculpture of both historical content, e. g. statues of Buffalo's two citizens who became presidents of the United States, and contemporary material.

PART III - SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS:

April 15, 1929, originals in the keeping of the City Architect at the building.

B. VIEWS:

See illustrations attached, construction progress photos of John W. Cowper Company.

C. BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Primary Sources:

"Buffalo City Council Proceedings" July 3, 1928, p. 1505

Various departments of City of Buffalo, including:

Robert A. O'Hara, AIA, Director of Buildings
Edward Lindsay, AIA, Principal Architect
David More, Buffalo Arts Commission
and Jason P. Aronoff, Society of Architectural Historians
"Historical Significance"

2. Secondary Sources:

1927: "Buffalo City Hall" leaflet of Chauncey J. Hamlin speech about the building planning to Buffalo City Planning Association, December 7, 1927.

"Buffalo Arts Journal" article by Alexander O. Levy, Volume IX, No. 8, October 1927.

1929: Logic of Modern Architecture, R. W. Sexton, New York: Architectural Book Pub. 1929, p. 111 (model photo).

1931: History of the Niagara Frontier, M. H. Wilmer, Chicago, Clarke Pub., 1931, p. 1014.

1932: Pictorial Buffalo: Niagara Frontier, Buffalo: O. Retter Pub., 1932, p. 2, 41.

1932: "American Public Buildings of Today" (source of attached plans).

1940: "Buffalo Architecture: 1816-1940", Henry-Russell Hitchcock, catalog of Albright Art Gallery Exhibit, 1940, p 7, 35.

1941: "Building for America: John W. Cowper Company" Buffalo, 1941, illustration.

- 1947: Buffalo: Your City Edwin F. Rundell, Buffalo: H. Stewart Pub. 1947, f.p. 1, p. 117.
- "Niagara Frontier Miscellany", Robert W. Bingham, editor, Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1947, p. 160.
- 1967: Buffalo, Metropolis of the Niagara Frontier, Lloyd Graham, Buffalo: H. Stewart, Pub. 1944
- 1970: "John W. Cowper Story", Cowper Co., 1970, p. 52.
- 1972: History of Erie County, Walter L. Dunn, Jr., editor, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, 1972, p. 260.
- 1976: Buffalo and Western New York, Architecture and Human Values, John D. Randall, Buffalo: Artcraft Burow, 1976, p. 81
- 1979: "Buffalo's Public Art", booklet by Mayor's Committee on the Arts and Cultural Affairs, 1979.
- 1980: Seeing Buffalo, Maggie Headrick and Celia Ehrlich, Buffalo, 1980.
- 1981: Buffalo Architecture: A Guide, Buffalo Architectural Guidebook Corporation, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1981

Periodicals:

"Buffalo Journal of Commerce", "Niagara Area", 1930 p. 113.

Buffalo Area Chamber of Commerce: "Buffalo" magazine now "Western New York", February 1944.

"Architectural Forum", September 1931, Vol. 55, p. 364.

Newspapers:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Buffalo Commercial Advertiser | September 20, 1922 | p. 3 |
| Buffalo Morning Express | November 25, 1925 | p. 5 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | July 20, 1926 | p.11 |
| Buffalo Times | July 17, 1927 | p.49 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | December 4, 1927 | p.11 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | December 13, 1927 | p.24 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | December 17, 1927 | p.13 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | June 14, 1928 | p.26 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | July 3, 1928 | p.20 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | November 4, 1928 | p.2 Sec. 9 |
| Buffalo Courier Express | November 13, 1928 | p.24 |

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|-------------------|--|--------------------|-------------|
| | Buffalo Courier Express | March 3, 1929 | p. 1 Sec. 9 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | July 7, 1929 | p. 1 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | September 2, 1929 | p. 18 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | September 20, 1929 | p. 26 |
| | Buffalo Times | September 22, 1929 | p. 3 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | November 11, 1929 | p. 11 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | May 4, 1930 | p. 22 |
| | Buffalo Times | May 11, 1930 | p. 3 - A |
| | Buffalo Evening News | September 5, 1930 | |
| | Buffalo Times | February 8, 1931 | p. 2 - B |
| | Buffalo Times | August 2, 1931 | |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | November 11, 1931 | p. 13 |
| | Buffalo Courier Express | May 14, 1932 | |
| | Buffalo Times | July 28, 1935 | |
| | Buffalo Evening News | October 12, 1944 | p. 28 |
| SEE FIELD RECORDS | New York Times (copied same date Buffalo Courier Express | October 2, 1977 | |
| | Buffalo Evening News | September 17, 1978 | |

SEE FIELD RECORDS Various anonymous descriptive briefs, 1933 to 1980, a representative copy attached.

Records of the Buffalo Landmark and Preservation Board, City Hall, including citation as "Buffalo Landmark", 1978.

A colorful rendering by Edward Pauly is displayed in the Buffalo architectural office of Reinhardt & Schwartz, 250 Delaware Avenue, and a line drawing by Ray Reinhardt is displayed in The Architectural Museum and Resource Center, 25th Floor of City Hall, Buffalo, New York.

D. SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED:

Complete data on architects and artists.
 Mayoral file records.
 New York State Historical Society.
 New York State Museum.
 Thorough examination, "Scrapbooks", Buffalo Public Library
 "Morgues" of local media.
 Buffalo Assessor files.
 Columbia University Guastavino Archive.
 Local photographic company files.
 Records of participating professional firms.

E. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:

Photos, Indexed description,
 New York Times article, and
 Informal description paper.

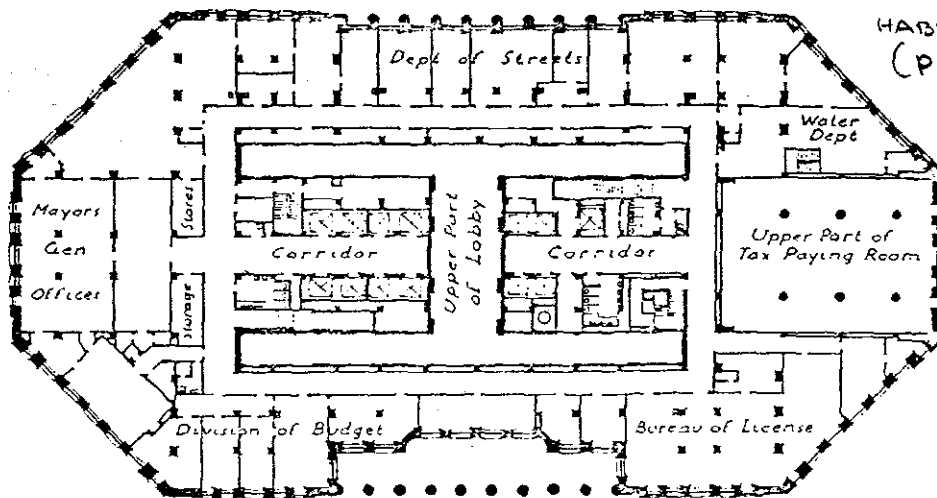
Design Concept Notes:

The City Council considered (1925) a recommendation to engage McKim, Mead & White and to conduct a "contest". It considered a design by City Architect Howard L. Beck (1926) and one by George B. Post and Sons (1928). In 1927, it was proposed that four large searchlights be installed at the peak, probably inspired by Charles Lindbergh's awesome 1927 flight to Paris. It is likely that Mr. Wade's first design was inspired by Bertram Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol (1922-1932), and the final design was influenced by the Albany, New York, Al Smith Office Building.

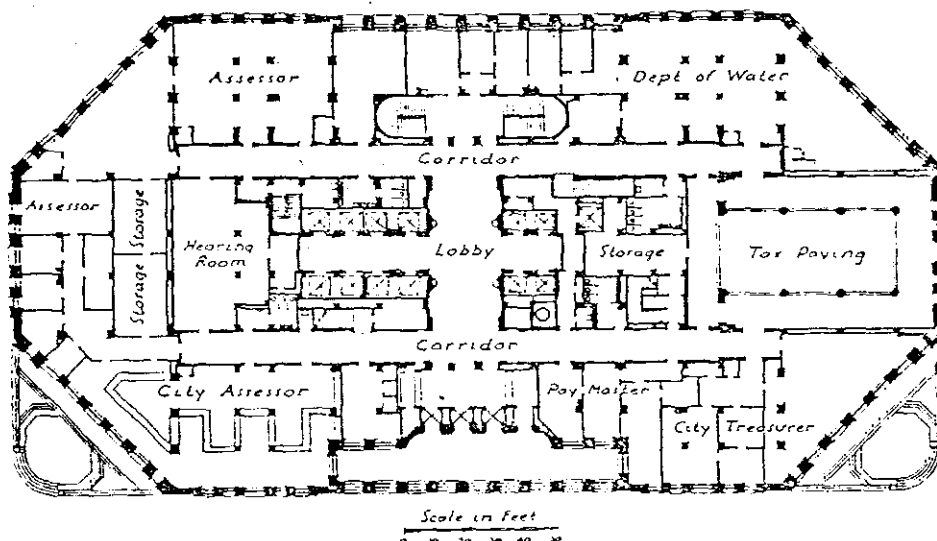
Credits: Appreciation for photographic attachments are due to City of Buffalo photographers Larry Cohen and Raymond F. Daniels and to The John W. Cowper Co., Inc. which firm requires printed credit for photography published.

The City of Buffalo is pleased to participate in this project and offers its further cooperation as appropriate.

Prepared by John D. Randall, Director
The Architectural Museum and Resource Center
City Hall, September 12, 1981.

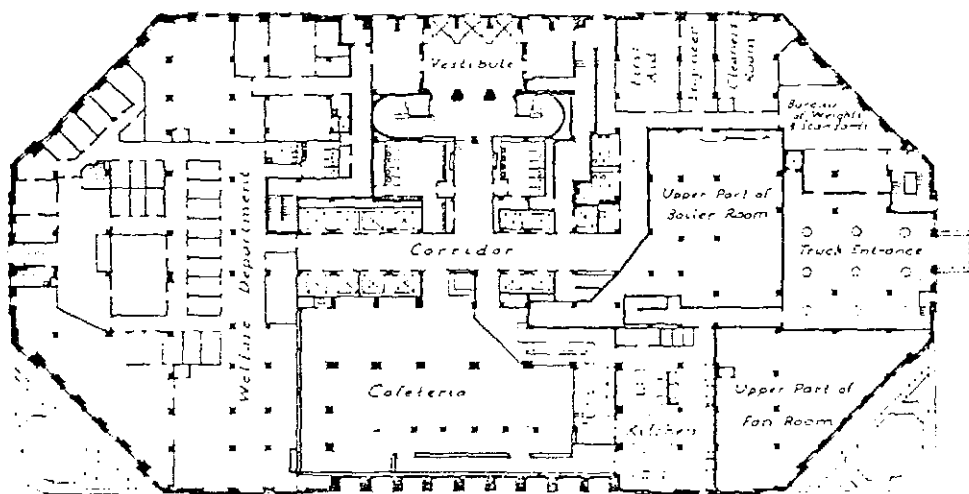


SECOND FLOOR PLAN



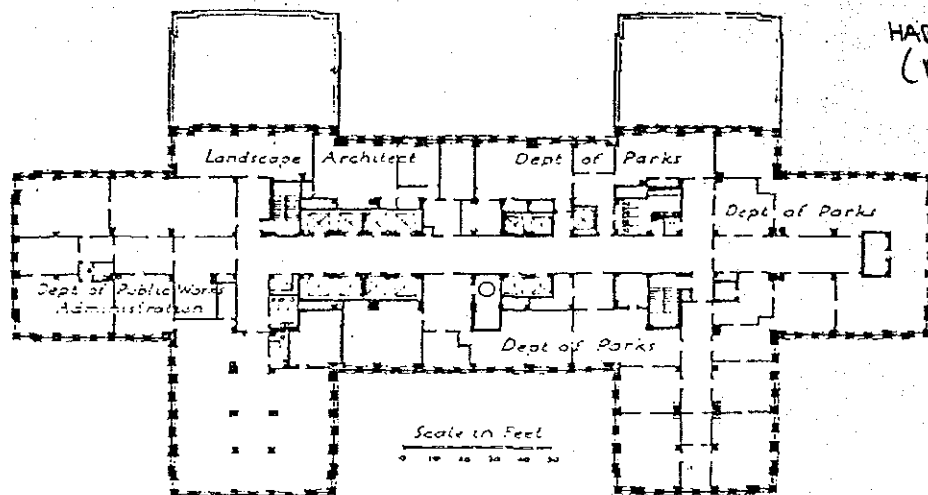
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

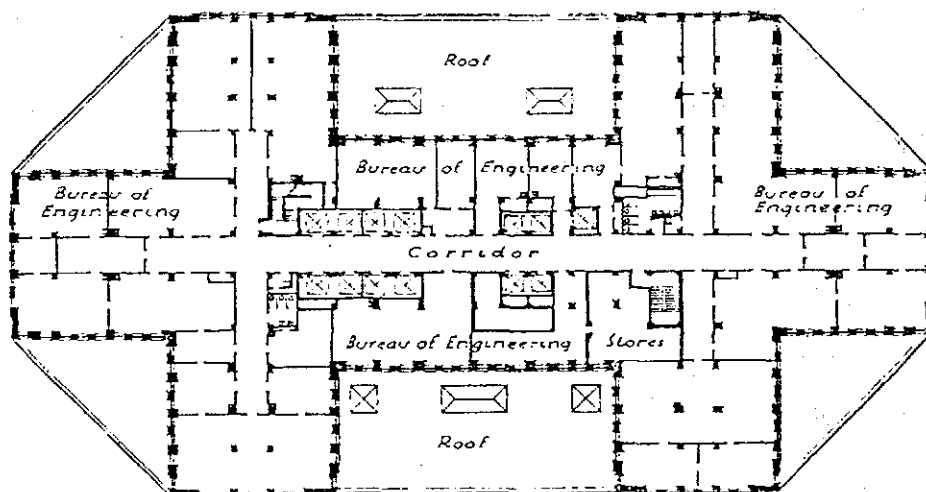


BASEMENT PLAN

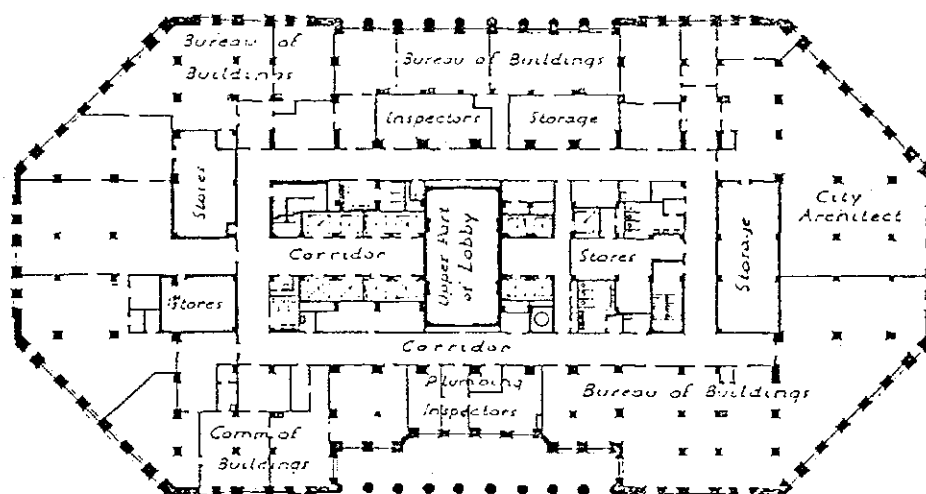
City Hall, Buffalo, New York
Dietel & Wade and Sullivan W. Jones, architects
The setback principle has been applied with interesting results



FIFTH FLOOR PLAN



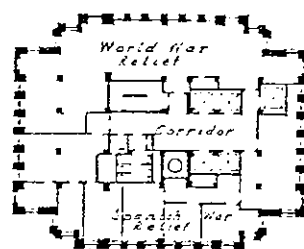
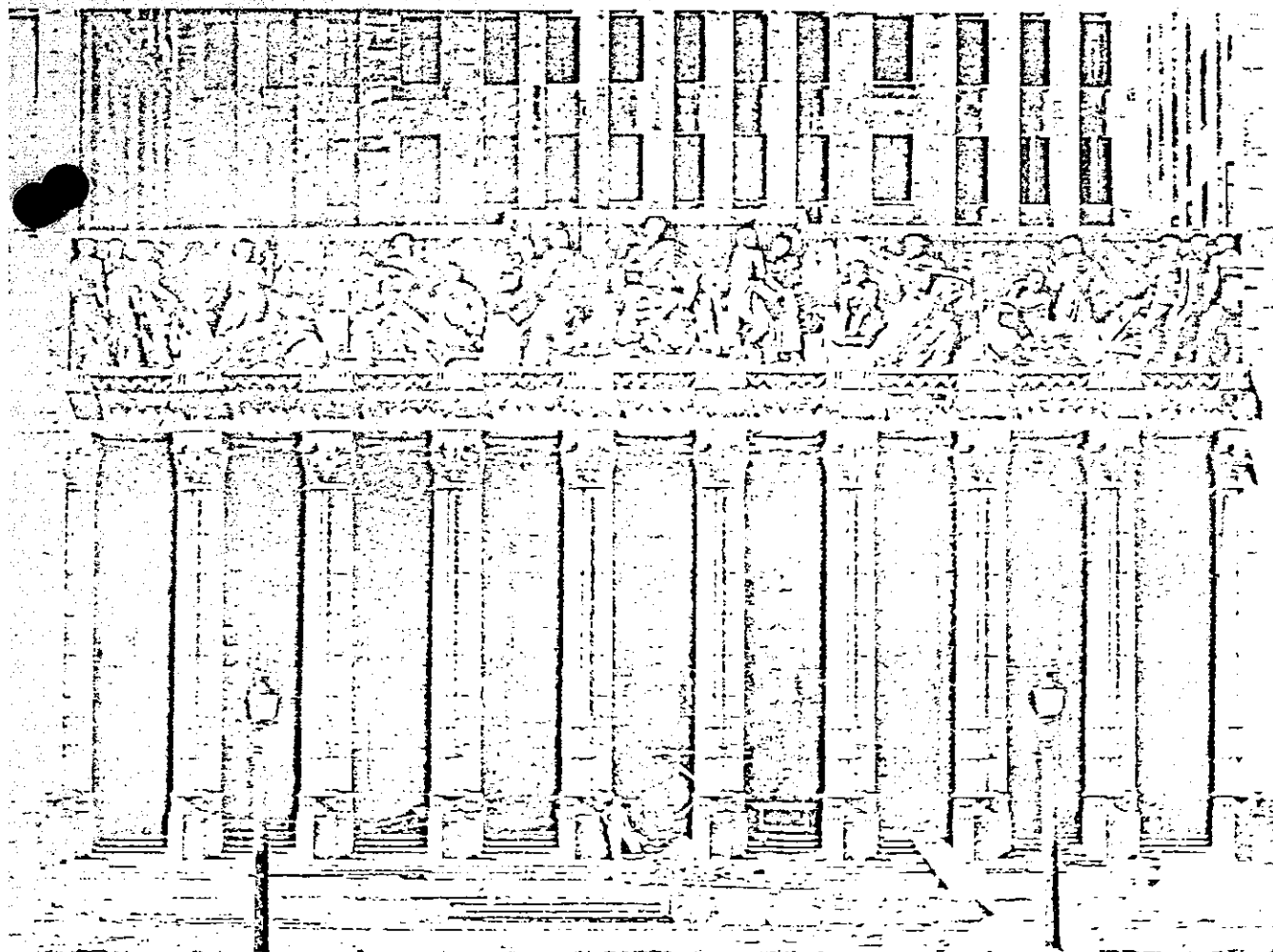
FOURTH FLOOR PLAN



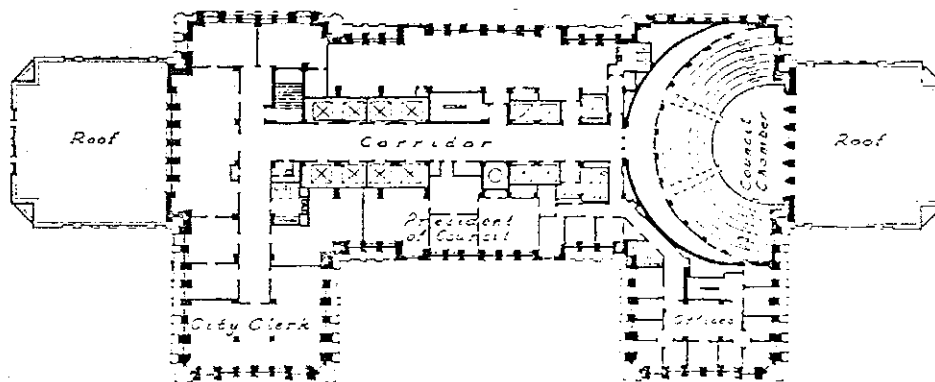
THIRD FLOOR PLAN

City Hall, Buffalo, New York
Dietel & Wade and Sullivan W. Jones, architects
A plan which affords light and air in practically all office space

A



SIXTEENTH FLOOR PLAN



THIRTEENTH FLOOR PLAN

Buffalo City Hall, Buffalo, New York
Dietel & Wade and Sullivan W. Jones, architects
A carved frieze adds to the interest of the entrance colonnade

OK